

EDUCATION OF YOUTH IN CUSTODY

DEFINITION: Utah Youth in Custody Program provides educational services for persons under the age of twenty-one who are in the custody of the Department of Social Services or who are being held in a juvenile detention facility.

The Utah State Board of Education, where feasible, contracts with local school districts and other appropriate agencies to provide education, administration, and support services for youth in custody.

The State of Utah began to “de-institutionalize” its youth offender population during the latter half of the 1960’s. At that time, the population of Utah’s sole institution for neglected and delinquent youth approached 420 students. Students from all areas of the state were assigned to the “Industrial School”. Contact with a child’s local community, the home, police, family service agencies, and school, was disrupted by the distance between the custodial site and the home.

By the mid 1970’s, it became apparent that local districts were incapable of absorbing youths who were referred to alternative care settings. For example, of 51 school age youths released from the state institution and referred to one urban school district, 19 were actually enrolled in school, and only one completed the school year; a retention rate of less than 2%. A broadly based inter-agency task force reviewed the problem and decided that a single state agency should be made responsible for the education of youths in custody. The task force then reviewed various options, such as a separate corrections education school district; leaving responsibility for education of youth in custody with the State Department of Social Services; and seeking closer cooperation with public education. Since the goal of any corrections program is to return its clients to the open society, the task force recommended that the State Board of Education assume responsibility for the education of all youths who were in state custody for reasons of neglect or delinquency, and that the State Board work as closely as possible with local school districts.

Accordingly, in 1979 the Utah State Legislature enacted legislation to make the State Board of Education directly responsible for the education of all youths who were in the custody of a state agency for reasons of neglect or delinquency. The State Board was further instructed to contract, where feasible, with local school districts for educational services. The legislature also created a State Coordinating Council for Youth In Custody to maximize the effective use of agency resources. At present, the council has twelve members representing service agencies serving youth in custody.

By 1988, the single large institution had been replaced with three new secure care facilities with a combined capacity of seventy youth; one new and two continuing observation and assessment units with an average capacity of fifteen youth, and ten various sized detention centers with an average capacity of thirty-eight youth in three urban detention facilities and an average capacity of eight youth in seven rural detention/shelter facilities. The remainder of the 2,000 – 3,000 neglected and delinquent youngsters in state custody is housed in community-based alternatives ranging from foster homes to small group homes.

All Utah youth in custody are now served by local school districts in accordance with individual plans. To the extent possible, students are taught in the same classes and in the same schools as non-custodial youths. All transcripts and diplomas are issued in the names of regular district schools, and no reference can be made in permanent school records to custodial status. Youths with special problems receive additional assistance, ranging from tutoring to self-contained programs.

Federal Chapter I funds (formerly Title I), less than 200,000, are used to provide additional support for remedial and special help programs in the basic skills areas with focus on language arts and mathematics. The goal is to increase the students' competency so each student can re-enter and successfully function in a regular school/community setting.

Each participant is tested by a state authorized testing or observation center or by the accepting local school district to identify specific skill/competency needs and to develop an individual educational plan as required by state standards. The State Office of Education has established a set of standards and guidelines for the operation of all programs.

To assure maximum input from all service agencies, each funded district must have an advisory council consisting of at least a representative from the Division of Youth Corrections, Division of Family Services and Office of Community Operation, Juvenile Court, and Education. Broader representation is encouraged. Local Advisory Councils are advised to review annually the goals, objectives, activities, and evaluation processes of each program, which are to maximize the successful re-entry of each student into community and family life.

In 1985 it cost \$32,000 per resident per year for a Utah secure juvenile facility. * The average hourly educational cost of Youth In Custody in 1985-86 ranged from \$6.79 per student hour in secure facilities (SL Code) to \$3.13 in local school district self-contained classes (IS Code) to \$2.60 in locally integrated classes (RSI Code). Increase in academic skills as reported in pre and post-testing are significant and greater than anticipated by traditional days of membership. While the enrollments in Youth In Custody Programs has increased, the total cost per student has decreased – 1983-84, 3,622 students @ \$766; 1984-85, 3,996 students @ \$735; 1985-86, 4,526 students @ \$512**, and in 1986-87 the reported student enrollments were 7,335 at an average cost of \$481. The process of placement of youth in less secure facilities with local support is working and is less expensive than traditional custodial programs.

*U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, 1985, page 5, Table 10.

**Utah State Office of Education, Utah School Finance Reference Manual, 1985-86, page 9.